

Federal law enforcement personnel may retire with full benefits after 20 years, while paying slightly more out of each paycheck for these increased benefits. While DS agents may currently retire at age 50 with 20 years of service, their annuity calculation is based on the smaller level of contribution.

My bill helps correct a basic matter of fairness. Diplomatic Security agents perform the functions of law enforcement officers, and they should receive the benefits associated with those responsibilities.

TRIBUTE TO THE QUBA INSTITUTE

HON. THOMAS M. FOGLIETTA

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 6, 1997

Mr. FOGLIETTA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Quba Institute, which has educated members of Philadelphia's Muslim community since 1968. The institute offers varied forums of Islamic studies, such as lectures, classes, workshops, reading groups, day school, and Qur'an school. Students at the Quba Institute are encouraged to strive for overall academic excellence in addition to pursuing traditional Islamic scholarship. In order to achieve the optimal balance, traditional religious studies are paired with modern techniques to achieve a well-balanced academic experience.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the Quba Institute's record of producing rigorous scholarship and building character among its students, I hope my colleagues will join me in honoring this fine school on this day.

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1997

HON. DON YOUNG

OF ALASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 6, 1997

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to introduce on Tuesday, February 4, along with our distinguished colleagues JOHN DINGELL, JIM SAXTON, and JOHN TANNER, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.

This measure, which is the product of several years of careful deliberation, would be the first comprehensive refuge reform legislation since the enactment of the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act of 1966. In fact, this is an improved version of the bill that the House of Representatives overwhelmingly adopted on April 24, 1996, by a vote of 287 to 138.

By way of background, it is important to note that the National Wildlife Refuge System is comprised of Federal lands that have been acquired for the conservation of fish and wildlife and offer recreational opportunities for millions of Americans. Totalling about 91.7 million acres, the System provides habitat for hundreds of species, including nearly 700 kinds of birds, 200 mammals, 250 reptiles and amphibians, and 200 kinds of fish. These refuge lands are not Federal parks, wilderness areas, or national marine sanctuaries. In fact, hunting

and fishing occur on more than 95 percent of the total acreage of the System.

The first wildlife refuge was created at Pelican Island, FL, in 1903, by one of our Nation's most prominent sportsmen and conservationists, President Theodore Roosevelt. Today, the System has 511 refuges, which are located in all 50 States and 5 territories. These units range in size from the smallest of 1 acre at Mille Lacs National Wildlife Refuge in Minnesota to the largest of 19.3 million acres in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. In the last decade, more than 80 refuges and approximately 4 million acres have been added to the System. Funding for refuge acquisitions comes from two primary sources: First, annual appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund; and second, the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, which is funded from duck stamps and refuge entrance fees. In fiscal year 1995, \$410.9 million was collected from our Nation's anglers and sport hunters.

While the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, authored by the distinguished gentleman from Michigan, JOHN DINGELL, has been a landmark law, there are many people who believe that this act is in need of modernization. For instance, there is no statutory list of purposes for the National Wildlife Refuge System, there is no statutory definition of what constitutes a compatible use of a refuge, refuges are not managed as a national system, fishing and hunting are arbitrarily prohibited on new refuge lands until governmental studies are completed, and there is no requirement to complete comprehensive conservation plans for any of the 511 refuges.

Under the terms of our new legislation, we have established for the first time a nationwide set of six purposes for our Refuge System. These purposes are: to establish a nationwide network of lands to conserve and manage fish, wildlife, and plants; to preserve, restore, and protect endangered and threatened species; to conserve and manage migratory birds, anadromous fish, and marine mammals; to allow compatible wildlife-dependent recreation, which has been defined as fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, and environmental education; and to fulfill international treaty obligations.

Second, we have defined the term "compatible use" by using the language the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service incorporated into their operating regulations years ago. While a refuge manager will retain the power to determine what is a "compatible use," this definition should provide the guidance needed to make the proper decision.

Third, wildlife-dependent recreation will be allowed to occur during the interim period after the land has been acquired, but before the implementation of a management plan, as long as the refuge manager determines that those activities are compatible.

The author of this "open until closed" provision is the Gentleman from New Jersey, JIM SAXTON. It is an essential change because there are a growing number of Americans who are angry and frustrated over the Service's land acquisition process. These Americans have worked hard to protect certain lands, they have contributed millions of dollars to the purchase of refuge lands, and they have found, much to their dismay, that for no rational reason their favorite fishing spot is not off limits during open-ended periods of governmental studies.

Fourth, this legislation provides that fishing and hunting should be permitted unless a finding is made that these activities are inconsistent with public safety, the purposes of the specific unit, or are not based on sound fish and wildlife management.

Finally, the proposal requires the formulation of conservation plans for each of the 511 refuges within 15 years of the date of enactment. It is important for the public to know what kind of archeological, natural, or wildlife resources exist on these refuges, and the allowed public uses of these resources. This inventory has been a goal of the environmental community for many years.

While this is a brief overview of the provisions of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, there are a number of things that the legislation does not address. For instance, it:

- does not permit or require hunting and fishing to occur on every wildlife refuge. These activities must be found "compatible" and must meet a three-part test. Fishing and hunting can only occur on refuges when consistent with sound fish and wildlife management practices, with the fundamental reasons the refuge was created, and with public safety;

- does not affect Federal, State, or local water rights. This bill does not limit the ability of the Federal Government to secure water for a refuge;

- does not facilitate nonwildlife-dependent uses such as grazing, farming, mining, oil and gas development, jet skiing, etc. As under current law, nonwildlife-dependent uses may continue to occur when compatible, and when the Fish and Wildlife Service lacks legal authority or sufficient ownership interest in the property to prevent them. But this bill does not mandate, enhance, or protect such uses;

- does not increase or decrease the size of any of the 511 refuge units;

- does not permit unapproved pesticides to be used by row farmers or anyone else in the Refuge System;

- does not permit the commercialization of our Refuge System. To repeat, this bill makes only compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses a purpose of the system. They are clearly defined as fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, and environmental education; and

- does not limit the Fish and Wildlife Service's ability to acquire new refuge lands at existing refuges. In fiscal year 1998, the service will propose to spend millions of dollars to acquire additional new acreage for our Refuge System. Our bill will not delay, stop, or otherwise affect those acquisitions.

It is my hope that during the debate on this bill in the 105th Congress, we will witness an accurate portrayal of the true impact of the provisions of this proposal. It is time to stop the misrepresentation of this bill as an effort to require hunting on refuges and the commercialization of the System.

This legislation is supported by the American Archery Council, the American Sportfishing Association, B.A.S.S., Inc., the California Waterfowl Association, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, International Bowhunters Organization, Masters of Foxhounds Association of America, Mzuri Wildlife Foundation, National Rifle Association, National Wild Turkey Federation, New Jersey Federation of Sportsmen, North American Waterfowl Federation, Quail Unlimited, Ruffed